

## **DEEPWATER HORIZON INCIDENT**

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

#### **Are the beaches in the panhandle being affected by the oil spill at Deep Horizon in the Gulf of Mexico?**

Based on information from the DOH Beach Program, as of 4/29/10, Florida beaches are not being affected. If there are any changes, the DOH, in conjunction with DEP, will issue an advisory.

#### **I am concerned about the burning of the oil and how it will affect the air quality near my home. How do I find out information on the air quality in Florida?**

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection continuously posts air monitoring data on ozone and particulate matter at [http://www.dep.state.fl.us/air/air\\_quality/airdata.htm](http://www.dep.state.fl.us/air/air_quality/airdata.htm). These two parameters are used to calculate the air quality index (a national health-based standard set by the US EPA) of an area. Information about the Air Quality Index can be found at [http://www.dep.state.fl.us/air/air\\_quality/aqi.htm](http://www.dep.state.fl.us/air/air_quality/aqi.htm). The five categories of the Index run from "Good" to "Very Unhealthy". Please encourage the public to login and monitor the posted data and watch for any air quality advisories based on the reported data. Unfortunately, there may be a lag between the times of the data collection to the analysis of the data for use in any actual air quality advisories. The public should be aware that conditions can change rapidly and they should use general precautions to reduce exposure.

#### **What are tar balls? Are there any on my local beach?**

Tar balls are fragments or lumps of oil weathered to a semi-solid or solid consistency, feel sticky, and are difficult to remove from contaminated surfaces. They are formed through the combining of viscous hydrocarbons with debris that is present in the water column. They range in size from a pinhead to approximately 30 centimeters in diameter. You can read more about them on the web at [http://www.dep.state.fl.us/law/BER/resources\\_links.htm](http://www.dep.state.fl.us/law/BER/resources_links.htm).

#### **I am concerned about the oil-like odors I am noticing near my home. What is this and is it dangerous?**

DEP and DOH county health departments are receiving complaints about burnt oil-like odors. At this time (4/28/10), the specific identity and cause of these odors is unknown.

Some of these odors may be identified by the volatile organic compound (VOC) monitoring being conducted by DEP. DOH stands ready to analyze results of these tests for potential health impacts.

DOH is also coordinating with DEP to review air monitoring data for particulate matter in the air. While results are currently normal, abnormal levels of particulate matter can aggravate existing respiratory conditions such as asthma and have been associated with increased rates of hospitalization and emergency room visits for persons with existing heart and lung diseases.

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection has asked that individuals with an air quality question or concern should contact the Environmental Protection Agency Region 4 National Response Center at 1-800-424-8802.

#### **Is the shellfish in panhandle waters safe to eat?**

According to information that DACS has, Louisiana will release either this evening (4/29/10) or tomorrow information that they will be closing some of the shellfish harvesting as a precautionary measure due to the potential oil sheens that could break off. Alabama did not have any closures related to this issue. We do not have any closures at this time due to this event.

DACS Division of Aquaculture main number: 850-488-4033

Daily Status of Harvesting Areas: [http://shellfish.floridaaquaculture.com/seas/seas\\_statusmap.htm](http://shellfish.floridaaquaculture.com/seas/seas_statusmap.htm)

- Shellfish Harvesting Area Information (by name of area): [http://www.floridaaquaculture.com/seas/seas\\_areainfo.htm](http://www.floridaaquaculture.com/seas/seas_areainfo.htm)
- Shellfish Harvesting Website: [http://www.floridaaquaculture.com/SEAS/SEAS\\_intro.htm](http://www.floridaaquaculture.com/SEAS/SEAS_intro.htm) (explains terminology)
- Live Water Monitoring: [http://sondes.floridaaquaculture.com/sondes/sonde\\_cedarkeygulfjackson.htm](http://sondes.floridaaquaculture.com/sondes/sonde_cedarkeygulfjackson.htm)

**If areas are affected by an oil spill:**

- Avoid entering areas where oil can be seen or smelled. If you see or smell oil, leave the area right away.
- Avoid direct skin contact with oil, oil-contaminated water and sediments.
- Do not swim or ski in areas affected by the oil spill, and if you travel through the area by boat, take precautions when hoisting the boat anchor. If you get oil on your skin, wash it off immediately with soap and water.
- Do not fish in the oil spill-affected waters.
- Do not harvest and eat dead fish, fish with oily residue or fish that have a petroleum odor.
- Do not drive your boat through slicks or sheens.
- Young children, pregnant women, people with compromised immune systems, and individuals with underlying respiratory conditions should avoid the area.
- Restrict pets from entering oil-contaminated areas.